

## **B. Outreach**

Without the confidence and cooperation of the victim **congregations**, many of these **investigations**, which were **difficult** at the **outset**, would have been destined to **fail**. The NCATF took steps early on to ensure a **solid**, working relationship between law enforcement and the affected **communities**.

Less than a week **after** being **formalized**, the NCATF met with FBI and ATF Special Agents in Charge and U.S. Attorneys from the Southeast region to emphasize the critical importance of pursuing the investigations with **vigilance**, determination and **dispatch**, as well as with sensitivity to the needs of the **victims**.

The **President**, Vice President **Gore**, Secretary of the Treasury Robert **Rubin** and Attorney General Janet **Reno** have worked to bring church **arsons** to national **attention**, speaking out forcefully of the commitment of the Federal government to **solve** these church **arsons** and meeting with ministers from the churches burned. Secretary **Rubin** and Attorney General **Reno** instructed Assistant Secretary Johnson and Assistant Attorney General Patrick to remain in close contact with the **affected communities**. In addition to meeting regularly with representatives **from** the National Council of **Churches**, the **NAACP**, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congressional Black **Caucus**, Assistant Secretary Johnson and Assistant Attorney General Patrick have both **travelled** on numerous occasions throughout the South to meet with church and community leaders and to view personally the devastation these **arsons** have wrought.

The investigators have played a crucial role in outreach **efforts**. As a student in **Enid, Oklahoma**, Dewey Webb had helped move pews into the **sanctuary** of the First Missionary Baptist **Church**. When he returned as ATF Resident Agent in Charge of the Oklahoma City Field Office, it was to solve a **crime**, by **sifting** through the ashes of the burned-out **sanctuary**. But he was also moved to assure the congregations that his team would proceed with **compassion**.

Similarly, in **Boligee, Alabama**, where the burning of three churches led the community to initiate a model of racial reconciliation and community **relations**, Robert **Langford**, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Birmingham **office**, met with church **leaders**, worshiped with the victim congregations and participated in hate crimes **seminars**. Most **importantly**, **he** demonstrated through his actions that his team empathized with the victims and was doing its best to bring those responsible to **justice**.

The Community Relations Service (CRS) also has been an important partner in Task Force outreach **efforts**. CRS conciliators have worked in many **communities** affected by church burnings to **identify** and resolve racial **conflicts** and reduce racial **tensions**, to foster healthy relationships between law **enforcement** and minority **communities** and to facilitate communications among **all parties**. The NCATF also developed and distributed to every **ATF** and **FBI** supervisor and U. S. Attorney a "Best Practices" guide for conducting **community outreach activities**.